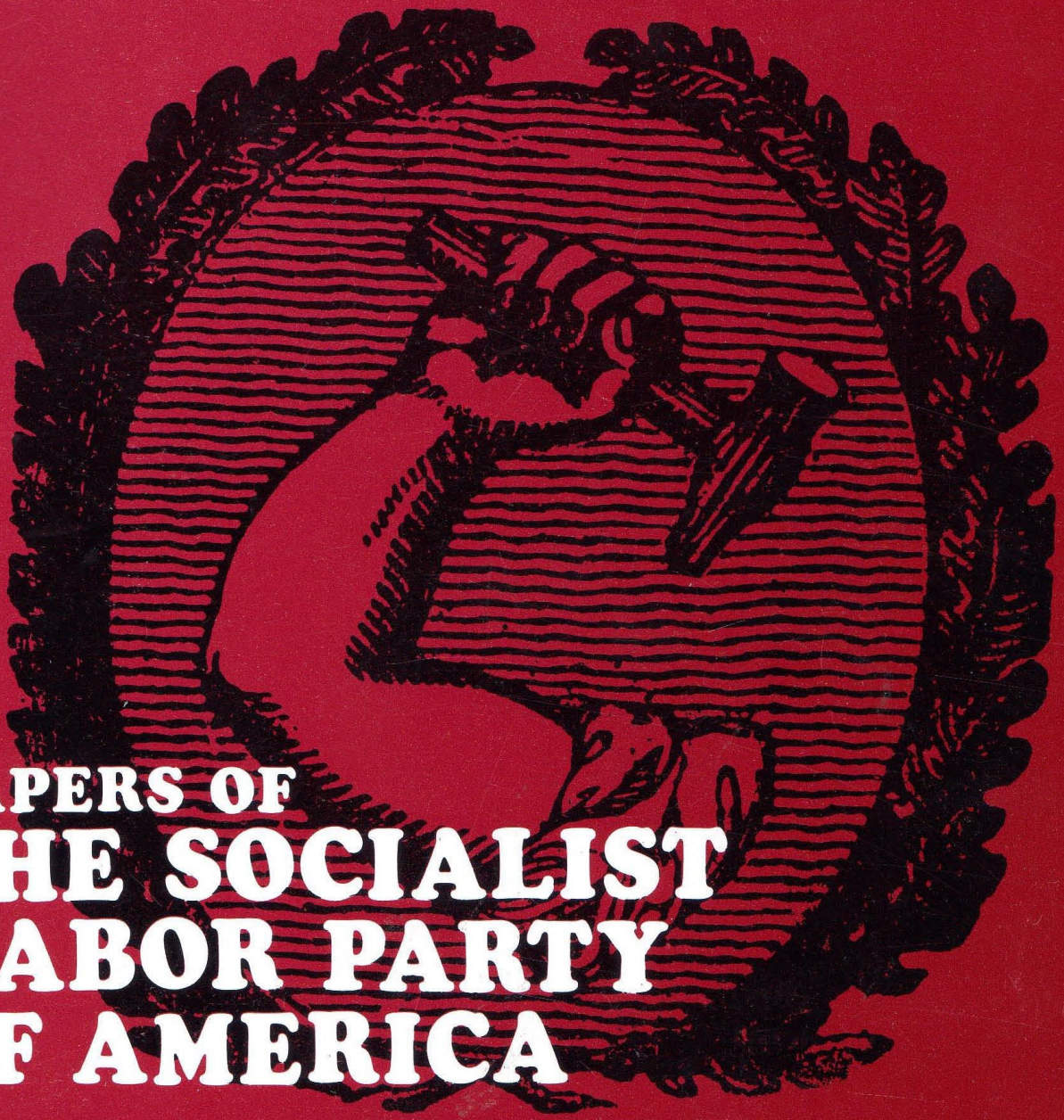


PAPERS OF THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY OF AMERICA

GUIDE TO A MICROFILM EDITION

RECORDS OF THE

SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY OF AMERICA

Guide to a Microfilm Edition

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PREFACE

THIS MICROFILM EDITION of the records of the Socialist Labor Party of America is the second in a series of such publications to be produced by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin under the sponsorship of the National Historical Publications Commission.

These records provide important documentation on the response of the American workingman to the process of industrialization during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Reflected in these letters and other documents is the attempt of one segment of the working force, largely immigrant in composition, to cope with a system that seemed bent on destroying it. The collections also reveal the evolution of an ideology, heavily influenced by the writings of Karl Marx as interpreted by Daniel De Leon, which was counterposed to the traditional American notions of entrepreneurship and industrial democracy. It is toward a clearer understanding of these historical processes and ideologies that we have prepared this microfilm edition.

This publication project has been a co-operative effort utilizing the talents and knowledge of several people whose contributions are inadequately acknowledged in this prefatory note. The associate editor, Miss Carole Sue Warmbrodt, supervised the preparation of the papers for microfilming and compiled a major part of this descriptive guide to the collection. With her resignation from the project to become Mrs. Ronald R. De Laite, we turned to an accomplished writer of descriptive guides, Dr. Josephine L. Harper, who, in addition to her regular duties as Reference Curator, completed the manuscript of this pamphlet. Mr. Lee E. Steinberg, the project's manuscript preparator, organized most of the records for this microfilm edition. W. Robert Austin, head of the Society's Photoduplication Laboratory, set high technical standards in the production of the microfilm copy. Many part-time assistants performed the necessary but tedious tasks of typing, checking documents, and editing microfilm. One of these assistants, Mrs. Waltraud B. Tepfenhardt, merits special mention for identifying many of the documents written in German script.

Important support came from several persons. The project greatly benefited from the guidance and counseling of Oliver W. Holmes, Executive Director of the National Historical Publications Commission, and his assistant, Fred Shelley. The former director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., and the acting director, Richard A. Erney, provided strong institutional support for the project; and Mrs. Margaret R. Hafstad, Manuscripts Curator, assisted the editors in the problems of arrangement, description, and documentation.

The editor is grateful to these many persons for their contributions to this microfilm edition of the Socialist Labor Party records.

F. GERALD HAM

Madison, Wisconsin

TO THE RESEARCHER

THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in issuing this microfilm edition is to make the records of the Socialist Labor Party widely available and freely accessible to researchers. Generally accepted research use of the collection is unrestricted.

The researcher is cautioned, however, that the Society, as exclusive custodian of the Socialist Labor Party records, expressly prohibits the unauthorized reproduction of this material by any institution or private individual. With the exception of brief extracts, permission to publish any of the letters, reports, or drafts of articles in the Socialist Labor Party papers must be secured from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The researcher is further cautioned that neither the Society's exclusive ownership of the collection nor authorization to publish material in the papers constitutes a conveyance of those literary rights not held by the Society. It is the responsibility of the author or his publisher to secure the permission of the owner of literary property rights in unpublished writings.

In citing documents in the Socialist Labor Party collection, the researcher should credit the State Historical Society of Wisconsin as custodian of the original papers. The following is a suggested citation: Socialist Labor Party of America Records (microfilm edition), State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1970.

THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY

FOUNDED IN 1877, the Socialist Labor Party developed into the foremost socialist organization in the United States at the turn of the century and was the first American Marxist party to survive and maintain its existence over a long span of years. During the middle 1870's several attempts were made to achieve an effective union of socialist organizations in the United States. In 1876 delegates from four diverse groups—the North American Federation of the International Workingmen's Association, the Social Democratic Working-Men's Party of North America, the Labor Party of Illinois, and the Socio-Political Labor-Union of Cincinnati—representing a membership estimated at between 2000 and 3000 persons, in convention at Philadelphia consolidated under the

name of the Workingmen's Party of the United States. At its next convention in Newark, New Jersey, in December of 1877, this organization reorganized and changed its name to Sozialistische Arbeiter-Partei, or, in its English version, the Socialistic Labor Party, a title which fifteen years later was revised to Socialist Labor Party. The German party name first chosen reflected the composition of the membership. In his *History of Socialism in the United States,* Morris Hillquit estimated that not more than 10 per cent of the members in the early years were American-born. Of the 90 per cent of the members of foreign origin, Germans formed the most numerous nationality segment and furnished many of the leaders, although the first secretary, Philip Van Patten, was a native American.

Throughout its early decades the Socialist Labor Party was frequently torn by internal factional disputes and controversies. One group of militant unionists led by F. A. Sorge of the former International Workingmen's Association withdrew in 1877–1878. Two other factions, syndicalist and anarchist in tendency, led by Albert Parsons, August Spies, and Johann Most, withdrew in 1881. Within the remaining membership conflicts were waged between the Lassalleans, the right-wing members committed to political action, and the Marxists, the left-wing revolutionary members emphasizing militant unionism. The Lassalleans controlled the party organization until 1889, but in the 1890's through the influence of new leaders, including Daniel De Leon, Hugo Vogt, Lucien Sanial, and Henry Kuhn, the party developed an aggressive program of its own along Marxist lines designed to appeal not only to the predominantly foreign-born members of the party but also to more native-born American workers. In striving to achieve party goals, De Leon and his associates emphasized that both militant trade unions and independent political action should be utilized in party strategy.

The shifting viewpoints of the party and its leadership are illustrated by its relationship with labor organizations and by its political behavior. Some members of the Socialist Labor Party, including Philip Van Patten, were members of the Knights of Labor. Others belonged to the American Federation of Labor. As individual socialists these members exerted some personal influence in both of these labor organizations. By 1895, however, there was an open breach between the Socialist Labor Party and these other labor groups. To compete with the rapidly growing American Federation of Labor, the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was formed under the party's auspices. Although the Alliance stirred troublesome controversy and dissension within a few AF of L locals, the Alliance failed in its appeals to the great majority of American workers. It was never able to mount any serious challenge to the American Federation of Labor, and its remnants joined in founding the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905.

In national politics the Socialist Labor Party gave its official endorsement to the Greenback Party in 1880, but four years later it supported none of the capitalist candidates for president and vice-president. It put its first national

ticket in the field in 1892 with the nomination of Simon Wing of Boston for president and Charles H. Matchett of Brooklyn for vice-president. These candidates polled more than 21,000 votes. By 1894 the party was clearly committed to its own independent candidates and platform to promote a revolutionary industrial democracy. In 1896 Matchett was the party's presidential nominee with Matthew Maguire as the vice-presidential candidate. After a vigorous national campaign, the party's vote was approximately double that of 1892. In state and local politics, particularly in New York state, the party provided candidates for various offices in numerous elections beginning in 1879. Nevertheless, until the 1890's the party sometimes found it expedient to support progressive or populist candidates running under other party labels in some state and local contests. In 1892 the party had an estimated membership of 3000, a figure which doubled by 1898. In 1898 the party's own candidates in state and local elections received more than 82,000 votes, the peak of its political achievement.

Although these membership and voting statistics seemed highly favorable, the Socialist Labor Party had in reality reached the zenith of its size and influence, for dissatisfaction with party policies and leaders was seething among members friendly to the American Federation of Labor, members evolutionary in their concept of socialistic thought and action, and members who resented De Leon's autocratic personality and firm party discipline. Led by Morris Hillquit, many of these dissenters withdrew in 1899 to form the Socialist Party, and from this schism the Socialist Labor Party never fully recovered.

HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION

In 1904, Professor Richard T. Ely of the University of Wisconsin School of Economics and Sociology established the American Bureau of Industrial Research to collect source materials relevant to the study of the labor movement in the United States. During the next few years, the Bureau amassed an impressive collection of documents and presented the materials to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin Library for preservation and research.

As part of the search for labor resources, in the summer of 1906 James B. Andrews, field representative for the Bureau, talked with Frank Bohn, national secretary of the Socialist Labor Party, about acquiring the official records of the party. Later that year, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party voted to give the records of the party's national office to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and to solicit the records of the party's state committees and local sections for inclusion in the gift. In 1907, the party presented to the Society the papers that comprise this microfilm publication.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

THE COLLECTION at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin which has been microfilmed consists of official papers of the Socialist Labor Party from its organization in 1877 until 1907. The records are divided into the following major series:

A. Records of the National Executive Committee, 1878–1906.
B. Records of the Party Press, 1885–1904.
C. Records of the National Board of Appeals (National Board of Supervision), 1878–1900.
D. Records of the National Conventions, 1877–1904.
E. Records concerning Party Activities: Notebooks, Scrapbooks, and Clippings, 1880–1905.
F. Records of State Committees and Local Sections, 1878–1906.

None of these series spans the thirty-year period of party history without many gaps in the files. The scope and content of each series are therefore described individually. Despite the fragmentation or paucity of some types of records, the collection as a whole documents many facets of the party's development, organization, thought, and tactics, as well as its contribution to the labor and socialist movements in a turbulent era of industrial change and of social and economic stress in the United States.

A. Records of the National Executive Committee, 1878–1906

THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE was the governing body of the Socialist Labor Party and made all major decisions between conventions. The duties of the Committee included carrying out the resolutions of the national conventions and enforcing their observance by all officers and members of the party; managing agitation; representing the party internally, publicly, and internationally; managing the party press; preparing for conventions; and reporting the status of the party to conventions.

Between 1876 and 1900, delegates to the national conventions chose the seat of the Committee, and the party membership ratified the decision. Then the party sections in the designated locality elected the members of the Committee (seven or nine in number), who served from convention to convention. In 1904, the national convention changed the method of election. Thereafter the Committee was composed of one delegate from every state which had a state executive committee. These delegates, chosen by a general vote of the state party membership, served for a term of one year.

Minutes, 1889 August 28–1891 September 27. Volume 1

This official minute book of the National Executive Committee contains

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